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Statements of Gen. W.

T. Sherman concerning  
Jefferson Davis and  
Senator Vance  
Vance

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The Statements of General W. T. Sherman Concerning Jefferson Davis and Senator Vance filed in the War Department.

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REMARKS  
OF  
HON. Z. B. VANCE,  
OF NORTH CAROLINA,  
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,  
*Tuesday, January 13, 1885.*

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The Senate having under consideration the following resolution :

*Resolved*, That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, requested, if in his opinion it be not incompatible with the public interest, to communicate to the Senate a historical statement concerning the public policy of the executive department of the Confederate States during the late war of the rebellion, reported to have been lately filed in the War Department by General William T. Sherman.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The resolution is before the Senate. The question now is on agreeing to the resolution, on which question the yeas and nays have been ordered.

MR. VANCE said:

MR. PRESIDENT: As the Senate will probably pass this resolution and place upon its records an unofficial paper, filed in the War Department by General W. T. Sherman, which contains statements affecting certain persons, it is but right and proper that all persons so affected should be heard in the same forum. As one thus interested, I desire to notice some statements made in that communication to the War Department. In order that I may not be misinterpreted I have placed in writing the material portions of what I desire to say, which shall be very brief.

It is understood and, I believe, not denied that in a speech made not long since in Saint Louis, Mo., General Sherman said he had seen a letter written by Mr. Jefferson Davis to a governor of a Southern State during the war, now a Senator, in which Mr. Davis threatened the coercion of any Southern State that should attempt to secede from the confederacy. As there are, I believe, three Senators at least on this floor who were governors of Southern States during the war, myself being one, I immediately on the appearance of that statement denied through the Post of this city that any such letter had ever been received by me. The newspapers soon afterward stated that General Sherman had been interviewed as to my denial, and had stated that he had not alluded to me

as the person to whom the alleged letter had been addressed. I very naturally thought that this denial at both ends of the line had concluded the matter so far as I was concerned; but it seems not. In the statement filed in the War Department, as published in the papers of the country, I find the following assertion:

At Raleigh, though the mass of the public records had been carried off, yet a number were left behind at the state-house and at the governor's mansion, called the "palace," which we occupied as headquarters during our stay there, namely, from April 13 to April 29, 1865.

These records and papers were overhauled by provosts-marshal and clerks, who delivered to Adjutant-General Sawyer such as contained material information, and my personal attention was only drawn to such as were deemed of sufficient importance. Among the books collected at the palace in Raleigh was a clerk's or secretary's "copy-book," containing loose sheets and letters, among which was the particular letter of Mr. Davis to which I referred in my Saint Louis "speech." I gave it little attention at the time, because Mr. Davis was then himself a fugitive, and his opinions had little or no importance, but it explained to my mind why Governor Vance, after sending to me commissioners to treat for his State separately, had not awaited my answer. It was the subject of common talk about my headquarters at the time, or, as stated by Colonel Dayton in a recent letter to me from Cincinnati, "I am quite sure that we generally talked [that] it was the desire of Governor Vance and the State officials to take North Carolina out of the confederacy, as I have stated, but they were afraid of Jefferson Davis and wanted protection."

Concerning this I have the following observations to make:

1. That no letters or documents of a public character were ever left at my residence in the governor's mansion, while I was governor, at any time.

2. No clerk or secretary of mine ever used as a repository for my correspondence a "copy-book;" all official or public letters being first copied in the letter-book required by law to be kept in the executive office, and then bound into bundles and placed in the files, where they remain to this day.

3. General Sherman did *not* find in that copy-book "the particular letter of Mr. Davis to which he referred in his Saint Louis speech," for the simple reason that there was no such letter there.

4. I aver most positively, on the honor of a gentleman and an American Senator, that no letter containing such a threat was ever received by me from Mr. Jefferson Davis. All letters from him to me of any nature are to be found copied in the letter-books of the executive department of North Carolina, now in the War Department in this city.

The reasons given by General Sherman by way of corroborating his statement are such as would scarcely be relied upon by a respectable lawyer. He says he paid "little attention to it at the time," and does not say that he ever saw it afterward; and further, that Mr. Davis was then himself a fugitive, and his opinions had little or no importance! It was, perhaps, the little attention given to the opinions of an unimportant man that enabled him to remember so well the contents of the letter in which they were expressed after the lapse of nearly twenty years! The suggestion as to the probable fate of that mysterious letter, that it was burned in the great fire in Chicago, is a mere apology for its non-production, which at the same time contradicts the idea of its importance; for had it been such as he says it was, it would certainly have found its way to the public files.

But there is another matter averred by General Sherman that more nearly concerns me, and to which I shall very briefly ask the attention of the Senate.

It may be that Northern gentlemen who were on the victorious side during the civil war can not properly appreciate the feelings and senti-



ments of those who were on the side of misfortune and defeat. They seem to regard it as quite a sin that we do not readily join in the denunciations of him who was our leader in the war, and hasten to condemn him on all occasions as the surest way of excusing our conduct and commending ourselves to the good opinion of our late opponents. Surely no man of even the slightest sense of honor could respect a Southern man who would thus debase himself. Surely the most flagrant and rampant trafficker in the issues of sectional hatred would prefer an adversary who walked upright on his feet to the one who crawled upon his belly. If not, what must be thought of his own manhood?

Now, sirs, be it known to you, that those of us who pledged our faith to each other for the establishment of the confederacy gave up all for which we contended when it failed, retaining to ourselves only one solitary satisfying reflection, and that was that we had at least served our country faithfully, honestly, and devotedly, as we understood it.

This satisfaction General Sherman's statement would to some extent take from me, and this it is, sir, which I resent. It is well known that I was drawn into secession unwillingly; it is also well known that in regard to many of the details of administration I was at variance with the authorities of the confederate government; but it is equally well known, I hope, that, after my own honor was engaged and the honor of my native State, there never was an hour during all that unhappy time in which I did not give every energy of my body, mind, and soul to the success of the cause to which I had pledged my allegiance. General Sherman, professing high respect for me, for which I thank him, thinks, perhaps, that he does me a kindness and commends me to the people of the country by holding out the idea that I was disaffected while Governor toward the cause for which I was ostensibly fighting, and that I was anxious to separate myself and State from the confederacy, but was restrained by fear. Sir, I want no man's respect or good-will based on the supposed virtues of treason to my country and the desertion of my associates. The good-will of a man who would respect these traits in another is not worth picking up from the dust of the common highways. General Sherman says that the commissioners whom I sent to meet him as he approached Raleigh, to wit, ex-Governor Swain and ex-Governor Graham and Surgeon-General Warren, told him that I wanted to make separate terms for the State, but was afraid of "Jeff Davis." I do not believe it. It can not be true. The two gentlemen first named are dead; they were eminent North Carolinians, of most exalted character in all respects, and most especially for truth. They *knew* I was faithful to the confederacy; they *knew* that I was not afraid of opposing Mr. Davis when I differed from him, because they had seen me constantly doing it, and they *never* told General Sherman or any other living man the contrary of what they knew to be true as perfectly as any men in North Carolina.

The other commissioner, Dr. Edward Warren, was surgeon-general of the State of North Carolina, is now living, and is an eminent physician in Paris. His statement would surely carry as much proof of what was said there as that of the witness cited to prove that there was talk about camp of "the desire of Governor Vance and other State officials to take North Carolina out of the confederacy, but they were afraid of Jeff. Davis and wanted protection." True it is that I sent a commission to him under a flag of truce to ask protection, not separate terms for the people of my State, but at that moment the war was virtually ended. Lee had surrendered, Richmond had fallen, President

Davis and his official household were fugitives, and General Johnston, commanding the last remnant of an army devoted to the South, was about to march westward, no one knew whither, and uncover the capital of the State. With his consent and approbation that embassy was sent, and through his lines under his permit it went. Before its return Raleigh was uncovered and I had left to join Mr. Davis, at Charlotte, where the surrender of General Johnston was authorized and the finality of things brought about. Then and there I took my leave of Mr. Davis and of the confederacy, and went back with his full approbation to share the fate of my people.

General Sherman finds an explanation of my failure to await the return of my embassy in the contents of the mysterious letter—that I was afraid of Davis, then a fugitive without an army. Bold enough he says I was to send an embassy to the enemy, but I was afraid to await its return! Was ever conclusion more absurd? The reason why I did not wait was that I had been told my embassy after passing through the confederate lines had been captured by Kilpatrick's cavalry, promptly robbed of their personal effects, and taken before General Sherman as prisoners. Not returning up to midnight of the day on which they were sent, I concluded this to be true, and left with the retreating troops.

How well and how faithfully I served the lost cause the country knows. My own people, sir, about whose opinion I am most concerned, will wonder that anybody can be found to question it.

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